

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, February 25, 1892, with transcript

( Wonderful letter GHG ) Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. L Steamship Fulda, Thursday, Feb. 25th, 1892. My dear Mabel et mes charmantes enfants:

We are now coasting along the shores of the Balearic Isles. Perfectly calm water — rain — and partial fog. Machinery moves so noiselessly that we could easily imagine ourselves to be at anchor. Very few passengers — only half fill the Captain's table.

As our “picturesque friend” — unfortunately for me — transferred the books and magazines I had purchased for myself — from my valise to parts unknown — I am reduced to the “Compte rendu du Congres International pour l'Amelioration du sort des sourds-muets tenu a Milan du 6 au 11 Septembre 1880.” I have been reading all morning — and now the thought has occurred — “Why not commence a journal?” — as before — I say “commence” advisedly — for I hardly think I can carry it on after reaching Boston. Here goes then for

### The Journal

1892. Feb. 22 — Lundi soir. Left Home in company with my p. f. Sleeping car — hot — uncomfortable — both passed sleepless night and were dumped out at Florence at 6 o'clock in the morning. Took a cab and drove to Hotel de Grande Bretagne. Went to bed in double-bedded room — leaving instructions to have our petit dejeuner of Cafe au lait etc., brought to bedroom at 9 o'clock.

1892. Feb. 23rd, Tuesday, at Florence.

Awoke at 12 o'clock noon and found my p. f. still asleep.

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Petit déjeuner on table — untouched and cold. With great difficulty managed to waken Mr. McCurdy. Took our coffee etc., dressed and found it time for lunch in the hotel so took a good lunch on top of the breakfast to steady matters and proceeded to the bank. I drew remainder of my Letter of Credit and deposited to your credit two thousand dollars by cheque on Bell & Co. I am afraid you will not be able to draw upon it until the amount has been collected by Maquay Hooker & Co. This may take three weeks or more. Better ask them to notify you when you can draw. In meantime your letters of credit will give you all you want. Received at Hotel two telegrams from you. Had grand search for your father's cheque but could not find it. Went from bank to Miss Clarke's house. Left Mr. McCurdy there ransacking and re-arranging trunks. Drove to Dr. Baldwins and had a satisfactory talk with him about Mrs. Benton's condition. He thinks she will get well. He gave me his card to Mrs. Costello — Mrs. Benton's friend. Called there. A vision of perfect loveliness and gentleness burst upon my astonished sight — fell in love with her at once — hope you know her. Made the acquaintance of her youngest child — about three years old. Talked to the child in baby-fashion and asked him how he would like to have a beard and moustache. Didn't take! — as the child was a girl! Mrs. Costello went with me to see Mrs. Benton — she told me that Mrs. Benton had been much worried about financial matters — but that the money her father had sent seemed to have relieved her mind. Dr. Baldwin made some remark and added that the consequent improvement in her condition was most marked. Told Mrs. Costello privately — not to hesitate to tell you of anything you could do to help Mrs. Benton.

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Mrs. Benton much better but is kept in bed — very quiet. She has two lovely children — boys — and Mrs. Costello two little girls — youngest looks like a boy — fat — curly-haired — but has not the mother's beauty. Elder child decidedly pretty — much more like mother. Both of Mrs. Benton's boys fine looking little fellows. They all had bunches of coloured ribbons on their shoulders in honour of Washington's birthday.

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Returned to hotel and found I had only a little more than an hour before dinner. The p. f. had not put in an appearance. Went out and invested in Century Magazine and some books containing collection of short stories for use on board the steamer and then went into a public bath-house near hotel for the luxury of a bath. Returned to hotel — 6 p. m. McCurdy there. Reported that he had brought three trunks to hotel and had taken harness to Anglo-American office where they would pack it and ship it direct to Baddeck. Wrote to McInnis to look after it. He had spent rest of time in Cooke's office or some other similar place and had made out his toure. Was in great spirits over plan. He was able to pay for his tickets — hotels, etc. and thus obviate necessity of carrying a large amount of money with him.

Think it would be a good plan for him — after visiting London to wind up in Paris and escort you all home.

Dinner at half-past six — Left Florence at 8:55 p. m. At depot found first-class compartment with only one person in it. Looked exactly like compartment we had to Rome — think it was the very same. Pleased with prospect of a stretch at full length — we each invested in a pillow — but just as we were leaving a lady and gentleman 4 made their appearance! and all thoughts of a good nap vanished into thin air. Lady was Italian — young — rather good looking — but jewish cast of features. Gentleman also Italian — large man — high intelligent forehead — pleasant smile — agreeable looking — sociable aort of man — evidently person of education. The first occupant of car was a solitary reserved individual — English — kept himself to himself — and studied certain papers or manuscripts with great assiduity. Turned out afterwards that he was studying up details of a “system” he had formed for successful gambling at Monte Carlo!

The entrance of the lady had banished thoughts of sleep and of smoking! — from the minds of my p. f. and myself but we were soon relieved by her escort inquiring in French whether we objected to his smoking. Whereupon we not only gave assent but ourselves produced cigars which with many bows etc., to the lady we proceeded to light. The Italian

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gentleman proved to be very sociable — and carried on a lively conversation with us in French. No difficulty in understanding him and when I was at a loss for a word he would recommend me to try “circumlocution.” I did so with great success and we spent a very agreeable night. We exchanged cards but owing to feeble light I was not able to read it even with my glasses. I have just looked at it and find we have had the honor of talking with the

“Marchese Luigi Mannucci.” He had some difficulty in mounting the steps of the carriage and walked about with some little awkwardness. He apologized for this by saying that he had a “jambe boiten” or “jambe du bois” — which at last I understood to mean “a wooden leg.” He further informed me that he was born with only one leg . He did not lose his other leg by accident but was born in his present condition. Would have liked to have questioned him further but subject seemed rather too personal and so I abstained.

Excepting for this malformation he seemed to be a perfectly formed and even handsome man. Remarkably pleasant and intelligent face — beaming over with good-natured smiles.

1892. Feb. 24th, Wed. Reached Genoa at 3 o'clock in the morning. Bundled out and took a cab for Grand Hotel de Gênes. So afraid of oversleeping myself that I passed a feverish uncomfortable time till waiter brought in coffee. With great difficulty aroused McCurdy. Went at once to office of Steamship Company and paid for my ticket while Mr. McCurdy went direct to Steamer with baggage.

Upon reaching steamer found I had to run the gauntlet of quite a number of official looking individuals — gendarmes etc., — I was asked my name — but was told that another “Graham Bell” had already gone on board! This turned out to be the p. f. who had evidently run the gauntlet under an assumed name! He had claimed a telegram for me and had so been noted under my name. Mr. McCurdy took charge of telegrams to you and to your father. (Glad to have been able to announce to you that McC. had found the missing cheque). Exactly at 10 p'clock a. m. the Fulda left her wharf and I waved my adieus to poor

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Mr. McCurdy who looked lonely and anxious as though he half meditated a flying leap on to the steamer.

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The vessel moved slowly out into the harbor — in the rain. I went to my state-room and looked out of the port-hole window at the scene.

A tug-boat was trying to pull the stern round. In a moment more there was a tremendous uproar on the tug-boat — loud shouting — excited gesticulation — something was wrong. Our vessel was backing and the tug-boat was endeavoring to turn. When I looked condition of affairs was somewhat as follows. The tug-boat was evidently in danger of capsizing! As I looked — the hawser broke — and the tug-boat righted itself. Our vessel continued to back slowly and the muddiness of the water showed that she had touched bottom and had had to back in order to save herself. The tug-boat evidently had a narrow escape.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before increased speed on the part of the steamer showed that we were fairly out of the harbor. I turned in at once and slept soundly in a good broad bed , until 6:30 p. m. — when I was awakened by my bedroom steward — a German with only a few words of English — with “Ah Mister”, “Ah Mister.” Dinner was on the table. I had slept through lunch and had had nothing to eat all day excepting a roll and a cup of coffee.

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He brought bill of fare but my sleepy eyes could make nothing out of it. He offered to bring something to me in the stateroom but I could not read the bill of fare and could not find my glasses and he could not understand English.

Finally I settled the matter by talking in my choicest German — and this is what I said: — “Bringen Alle — bringen alle” accompanying this by a wave of the hand — and a countenance expressive of hunger. Whether this is — or is not — choice German — I leave you to decide — but it answered its purpose — he brought “Alle” the bill of fare —

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and I was able to dress after dinner with a feeling of comfort I did not possess before. Went upstairs to smoking-room and enjoyed a really good cigar and at 9:30 p. m. had a warm salt-water bath — after which I retired for the night. This brings me up to today.

1892. Feb. 25th, Thursday. Wakened at 8:30 a. m. by the cry of “Ah Meester Bell — Ah Meester Bell” which my worthy bed-room steward ejaculates every half minute. He brought me some breakfast and I was on deck by half-past nine. Sea quite smooth — rainy day — or rather scotch mist — vessel gliding along silently and easily. Spent morning in smoking-room studying with interest the Proceedings of the Milan Convention.

Very nice passengers at table — will reserve notes of them till tomorrow. After lunch started to write this journal. Now 4 o'clock p. m. and vessel is beginning to roll — will go upon deck and investigate matters.

(To be continued in our next).

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Spent Thursday afternoon talking in smoking room — and reading a very original book by F. Austey entitled “Tormalirie Time Cheques” — which I found on board among the private books belonging to the steward. Dressed for dinner and talked to all the ladies within reach. So few passengers that I felt bound to make myself agreeable. The Captain sits in the middle of the table instead of the end. On his right hand sits your humble servant, and upon his left — (an Englishman I think — though he has a German name) Colonel Schomberg. Opposite to us sits Mr. and Mrs. Harrower. Both seem very nice. Mrs. Harrower tall — dark — dignified — fine figure — beautiful dark piercing eyes — pleasant face — and agreeable refined manner. On my right hand is a young lady — very nice and agreeable — and rather pretty too — Mrs. Kean, whose husband looks like a boy of eighteen.

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He is a Southerner — and in the smoking room talked in rather an insulting and sneering way of the “niggers” of the South.

I replied that I thought the negroes were entitled to equal rights with himself. It looked at first as if there might be some sharp words. The other gentlemen however, in the smoking room, so promptly sided with me that Mr. Kean very wisely allowed the subject to drop — and devoted himself to making himself agreeable. He seems to be a nice young fellow — and can hardly be held responsible for his Southern sentiments. He and his wife have spent about a couple of months in Corsica and Algiers. She seems to be very nice — but warned by the sentiments expressed by her impetuous young husband — I have not ventured to open up the subject of Slavery and the South . Friday, February 26th, 1892.

Went to bed early last night with a headache — wakened at 8:30 A.M. this morning by my funny German steward and his “Ah ?eester Bell.” Bacon and eggs and coffee were brought in — and about ten o'clock I ate my breakfast and made my appearance on deck.

Found one of our passengers, Mr. King, I think hard at work at piano trying over the ships music. He has a good touch and plays readily at sight. Expect we may have some good music.

We are running before quite a breeze though our vessel does not seem to feel it. The sea-gulls at the stern of the ship are flying backwards! Head to the wind — they allow themselves to be born along so as to be near the stern. Sailing-vessels we pass lean over so much that I suppose the wind must be quite strong. On deck we hardly feel any wind at all. Vessel too quite steady — although white caps and heavy swells all around.

Have just been forward to see the steerage passengers have their dinner or lunch. They are divided into squads or or messes — and one in each squad brings in the dinner. A large tin of nice looking soup full of macaroni and vegetables.